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SUBJECT: PM ABE, OTHERS HAVE NOW "GOT THE MESSAGE" ON
COMFORT WOMEN

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons:
1.4 (b)(d).

¶1. (C) Summary. PM Abe, DCCS Shimomura and other high-level Japanese officials will not speak out on the comfort women issue, at least until after the July Upper House election, according to MOFA Asian Regional Policy Division Director Aikawa. They will withhold comment for "tactical" domestic political reasons, as well as a better understanding of the diplomatic sensitivities, he claimed. Comments by the Ambassador and other "foreign friends," even though unpalatable, had been reluctantly received and helpful. Aikawa was mildly hopeful that plans by conservative LDP members to revisit the comfort women and Nanjing Incident issues would be dropped. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Prime Minister is surrounded by like-minded people when it comes to the comfort women issue, MOFA's Asia Regional Policy Director Kazutoshi Aikawa (strictly protect) observed to us March 30. He pointed to Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura, Agriculture Minister Toshikatsu

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Matsuoka, Minister of Internal Affairs and Communication Yoshihide Suga, Justice Minister Jinen Nagase, and State Minister for Administrative Reform Yoshimi Watanabe as all having been members of the Parliamentary League of Junior Lawmakers to Consider Japan's Future and History Education. The League was formed in 1997 during an earlier period of textbook reevaluation over the comfort women. Abe was the chief of the League's secretariat and Shimomura was deputy chief of the secretariat. The secretary general then was Seiichi Eto, whom Abe recently allowed back into the LDP after Koizumi expelled him in 2005 as a postal rebel, Aikawa noted.

¶3. (C) DCCS Shimomura, who has been outspoken in denying government involvement in the comfort women issue, comes from the education field and owns a chain of cram schools, Aikawa explained. That is how he first got involved in the textbook issue. Aikawa assured us that Shimomura, like PM Abe, has now "gotten the message." Neither will speak out before the Upper House election. Elaborating, Aikawa explained that the LDP right-wing is under pressure from its coalition partner New Komeito to stop talking about the issue, lest it become a campaign issue prior to the July Upper House election. Even the "true believers" understand that they need Komeito support and so, for tactical reasons, if nothing else, they

will remain silent "for the time being." Aikawa also believed that comments by Ambassador Schieffer and "old friends" of Japan like former NSC Director Mike Green, had been helpful. MOFA has been trying to explain the diplomatic sensitivity of the issue, but the message had not been getting through. He acknowledged that it was useful for these people to get the message, however unpalatable, from the Ambassador and others.

14. (C) The Prime Minister and the people around him are "true believers" who will not change their position on the comfort women issue, Aikawa observed. Half in jest, he said "The Prime Minister knows too much." Abe literally knows more about the issue than any other Diet member, having studied it for the past ten years, Aikawa asserted. Abe believes what he said about "coercion in the narrow sense" and "coercion in the broader sense." The difference between Abe and Koizumi is that Koizumi, who is not a detail-oriented person, would just have gruffly said "I apologize, I apologize," Aikawa suggested.

Kono Statement, Nanjing Incident Revisits Now Unlikely?

15. (C) Asked about plans by an informal group of lawmakers to revise the Kono Statement and reexamine the Nanjing Incident, Aikawa explained that Nariaki Nakayama, who heads the informal group that wants to reexamine the Kono Statement, may be censured by the LDP because he backed a DPJ candidate in his native Miyazaki prefecture. Tooru Toita, who heads the group that wants to reexamine the Nanjing Incident, is considered "way out" even by conservatives. Many conservative Diet members who are upset about the Honda resolution and the comfort women issue, understand that the Nanjing Incident happened and that arguing about the number of victims is counterproductive. For those reasons, Aikawa said he was hopeful that the proposed reexaminations would not go forward at all.

Release of Diet Library Documents on Yasukuni

16. (C) Aikawa, who is also responsible at MOFA for the Yasukuni issue, said he was totally surprised by the March 28 release by the Diet Library of documents showing involvement by the former Ministry of Health and Welfare in the enshrinement in Yasukuni Shrine of war criminals. No one, not even the Kantei, had been informed in advance. He did not believe there was any ulterior motive in the timing, but lamented the fact that neither MOFA nor the Kantei had been consulted prior to their release so that the issue of timing could have been addressed. Abe's comments that the government's involvement in the matter was "not a problem" had -- so far -- not resonated much or become a diplomatic issue, Aikawa observed. He was relieved that both the Chinese and South Korean governments were taking a relatively low-key approach to both the comfort women and Yasukuni document issues.

Asian Women's Fund, Kono's Remarks to Critics

17. (C) The Asian Women's Fund, which was set up in 1995 as a mechanism to compensate comfort women, will end on March 31 after 12 years, Aikawa observed. That date had been set several years ago, long before the issue re-ignited. Aikawa described at some length the difficulties of trying to assist comfort women in South Korea, compared to in Indonesia and the Philippines. China had "opted out" from the beginning for domestic political reasons, even though, he claimed, Japan had offered several times to provide assistance by setting up "assistance homes" for elderly Chinese former comfort women. After the Fund dissolves, several NGO's will pick up its work.

18. (C) Asked about remarks attributed to Yohei Kono in a book to be published shortly by the Asian Women's Fund that castigated critics of the Kono Statement as "intellectually

insincere," Aikawa said he had been concerned that the remarks were "rather inflammatory." Using such language in Japanese is quite insulting, he said. Kono was apparently asked if he really wanted the remarks included in the article. He said it was fine with him, according to Aikawa.

Comment

19. (C) Aikawa appeared confident that PM Abe and those around him would maintain a low-profile on the comfort women issue through the July election. How much of his judgment is based on knowledge of Kantei deliberations and how much is wishful thinking is unclear. Even granting that a tactical decision has been made to desist from comment for the time being, the possibility always exists that someone can be goaded into making remarks, particularly if the cast of characters feels as strongly about the matter as Aikawa claims. Aikawa hoped that, at this point, "foreign friends," too, would keep the volume down.
SCHIEFFER